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# A Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Death of the Other Understood as Event

**Harris B. Bechtol**

## Abstract

This is a phenomenological description of what is happening when we experience the death of another that interprets surviving or living on after such death by employing the term *event*. This term of art from phenomenology and hermeneutics is used to describe a disruptive and transformative experience of singularity. I maintain that the death of the other is an experience of an event because such death is unpredictable or without a horizon of expectation, excessive or without any principle of sufficient reason, and transformative or a death of the world itself.

## Keywords

Death, Mourning, the Other, Event, Phenomenology, Derrida

And you, O tree, whose branches already are casting their shadows  
on one poor body and soon will be overshadowing two,  
preserve the marks of our death; let your fruit forever be dark  
as a token of mourning, a monument marking the blood of two lovers.  
(Ovid, 2004, 4.157-161)

Poetry, literature, and art in general have a unique ability to expose us to common experiences so that we see the heart of these experiences as we live them out in everyday life. Art can function as a mirror of our deepest philosophical concerns by highlighting our average, everyday understanding of phenomena. Though classified under myth, Ovid's account of how the mulberry tree came to bear red instead of white berries functions in just this way. He shows in the tragic love of Thisbe and Pyramus how the death of a loved one is carried by the world itself through the world's own metamorphosis. Death and world remain integrally bound so that the

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**Corresponding Author:**  
Harris B. Bechtol, PhD  
Sam Houston State University  
Email: hbb014@shsu.edu

loss of someone changes the world itself. This understanding of the relation between world and death at the turn of the first century is also part of today's popular culture. The recent Netflix series *Daredevil* reflects back to us this average, everyday understanding of the transformative potentiality of the death of the other. When the questionable character, Elliot Grote, is killed by the Marvel anti-hero the Punisher, only three characters attend Grote's funeral: his legal representatives. Father Lantom, the priest presiding over the funeral, elaborates on this experience of death by highlighting this loss as more than just the loss of the person:

“Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints.” Well, Elliot Grote was no saint. He was human—deeply flawed. Every Sunday, for as far as I remember, Elliot would come here friendless and alone to sit right there in that pew. Often, I would see him take whatever money he had—crumpled one hundreds, loose change, a Rolex watch one time—and put it in the collection plate hoping for redemption, which would never come. Praying for the light, but Elliot died still in the dark with no one to mourn his loss except the three of you. And so, we might say one life gone, one sinful life, but one person is not just one person. In each of us, there is a world webbing out, reaching others. Creating reactions. Sometimes equal sometimes opposite. We rush to say one life gone, but each of us is a world. And today, *a world has been lost* [emphasis added]. (Kelly, 2015)

Despite art's ability to reflect back and highlight such experiences, it often does little to take us beyond their *singularity*. In a deeply important sense, any death is each time unique—*chaque fois unique* as Jacques Derrida says—so that any death is always already an experience of singularity that resists universalization. And yet such an experience of singularity to which art can expose us does not resist *philosophical* engagement. Engaging such singular experiences philosophically requires that a way, path, or method be chosen that seeks neither to universalize nor exhaustively explain these experiences. Undoubtedly, philosophy is wont to seek after the universal and the exhaustive, but this is not philosophy's only concern. Phenomenology and hermeneutics provide this way or path for philosophically engaging the death of the other in its singularity but without attempting to universalize the singular. Through a phenomenological description of what happens when we *survive*, that is, live-on after, *sur-vivre*, the death of the other, we can provide the contours of and offer an interpretation of such an experience of singularity. The death of the other is, then, each time unique, but the repetition of such a common event allows us to describe some of the crucial and abiding structures of these events. Each time unique, then, can be read as repetition of the same but always with a difference.

This phenomenological description of surviving the death of the other offers an understanding of the relation of death and the world. By deploying *event* as a term of art from phenomenology and hermeneutics, I limn the lines around the abiding structures of an experience of the death of the other by providing an understanding of what happens when we live on after such death. With this description, the relation among death and the world begins to be understood insofar as the death of the other is more than just the loss of the person but also the loss of the meaningful contexts in which we find ourselves. In other words, the death of the other is a death of the world.<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Here, and throughout, I draw from Jacques Derrida's insistence, “For each time, and each time singularly, each time irreplaceably, each time infinitely, death is nothing less than *an end of the world*” (*Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, Ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen [New York:

phenomenological account provides an understanding of the transformative and disruptive potentiality of the event of the death of the other on account of its unexpectedness, its excess, and its transformation of the world in its happening.

### Symptoms of an Event: Unexpected, Excessive, and Transformative

Considering that this description of the death of the other relies on the term *event*, understanding the symptoms of an event is necessary so that the importance of the description's contours may come into full relief. The event as a term of art became popular around the middle of the twentieth century when philosophers in phenomenology and hermeneutics began exploring ontologies outside of traditional substance metaphysics, which many believe emphasizes the mastery of the human subject over the objects that stand over against it. Substance metaphysical approaches, according to these philosophers, have been unable to engage with the most important aspects of life and being, which can be gathered under the heading of degrees or modes of givenness (Marion, 2002a; Gschwandtner, 2014). These philosophers are concerned with whatever exceeds the conceptual and linguistic horizons of subjectivity by either an excess of givenness or a givenness of recess. The name offered for such givenness is the event. Yet the diverse group of philosophers concerned with such an event<sup>2</sup> provides no universal definition that would capture the nature of an event. As Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) aptly says, "[T]here is no event 'as such'" (p. 169). Nancy and others resist any definition of an event because an event is understood to be an experience of possibility, contingency, and singularity itself. All we ever have in terms of our experience of an event are our experiences of *particular* events. We can have many experiences of events, in this sense, but we never experience the event as such. Thus, no universal, transcendent form of the event exists. Only a plurality of singular events exists. Attempts to universalize the singularity of any event are, then, resisted by these philosophers of the event.

Nevertheless, these philosophers often use similar language to describe what experiencing an event entails. For example, an event for these philosophers concerns a transformative moment when the "unexpected and unpredictable [disrupt] the normalized, neutralized, and forcibly pacified status quo" (Zabala & Marder, 2014, p. 9). And this disruption of a "singular occurrence" introduces "an element to our world or our situation that could not have been thought or predicated in advance and that, as soon as it has arrived, reconstitutes the previous relations between beings in a world because it interposes itself among them. Thus, it changes and reconfigures the world" (van der Heiden, 2014, p. 17). Consequently, an experience of an event

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Fordham University Press, 2005, p. 140] emphasis mine). On the strange arithmetic of this phrase where each death is a death of the one world, see not only below but also Harris B. Bechtol "Event, Death, and Poetry: The Death of the Other as Event," *Philosophy Today* (forthcoming) and Dennis Schmidt, "Of Birth, Death, and Unfinished Conversations" in *Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation*, Ed. Andrzej Wiercinski.

<sup>2</sup> This group includes, but is not limited to, Martin Heidegger, especially his work from the mid 1930s where he focuses on *das Ereignis* (the event) in conjunction with his career-long task of thinking the truth of being, along with the French reception of Heidegger's work by Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jean-Luc Marion, Françoise Dastur, and Claude Romano. In addition, John D. Caputo's recent work has made this topic popular for English speakers interested in Continental philosophy.

has a “symptomatology” (Derrida, 2001, p.105): We know when an event has disrupted the norms of everyday life because such a disruption carries common symptoms with it. With this, Derrida’s own writing on events can be used to represent this largely agreed upon structure of an event as unexpected, excessive, and transformative.

Derrida enumerates numerous aspects of our experiences of events: surprise, exposure, unanticipatable (*inanticipable*), unforeseeable, without horizon, unpredictable, unplanned, not decided upon, unexpected, singular, impossible, and secretive. We can summarize many of these themes in his work under three major aspects: impossibility, secrecy, and symptomatology. The impossibility of an event acts as the condition from which the other aspects flow. For Derrida says, “This experience of the impossible conditions the eventuality of the event [*conditionne l'événementialité de l'événement*] .... What happens, as event, can only happen there where it is impossible” (Derrida, 2001, p. 96). He does not mean that an event is a logical impossibility. Rather, the condition of an event’s possibility is found only in its *phenomenological* impossibility, that is, there where the occurrence of an event, the breaking in of an event into the status quo, does not accord with our horizons of expectation for an experience. An event is impossible in this sense because it is unanticipatable: Its occurrence exceeds or even resists our horizons of expectation through which phenomena ordinarily occur for us. An event suddenly breaks in and surprises us because it cannot be seen according to these horizons of expectation. Thus, Derrida (2001) says that we must speak of “the im-possible event” where the hyphenation of this word indicates “not only the opposite of the possible” but also “the condition or the chance of the possible” (p. 101). This im-possible event is not, however, “inaccessible” because it still “announces itself ... swoops down upon and seizes me *here and now* ... in actuality and not potentiality .... It is what is most undeniably *real*” (Derrida, 2005, p. 84). An event is possible there where it finds its limit in our various conceptual and linguistic horizons of rationality through which life becomes relatively predictable and stable. Yet this does not mean that an event never occurs. Rather, when an event arrives, its arrival disrupts the relative predictability and stability of everyday life. An event remains phenomenologically impossible to our expectations and known possibilities all the while bringing its own possibilities through which it appears. Thus, Derrida (2006) says, “It may be, then, that the order [of the event] is other ... and that only the coming of the event allows, after the event, perhaps, what it will previously have made possible to be thought” (p. 18). Only after an event can we then begin to think what this event has made possible on account of the new conditions of possibility that attend its arrival.

With its possibility found in its impossibility, Derrida points us to the second major aspect of an event: Secrecy. An event is secret not insofar as it is hidden or clandestine but insofar as it “does not appear” (p. 105) in the way that we expect other phenomena to appear (Derrida, 2001). As a phenomenological im-possibility, this non-appearance of an event removes it from any principle of sufficient reason or search for universal knowledge about the event. As such, an event remains “unexplainable by a system of efficient causes” (Derrida, 1992, p. 106) because such a system belongs to our horizons of expectation through which life becomes relatively stable. Accordingly, Derrida (2001) says that if we can define an event with “one possible definition” it would be that “an event must be exceptional, without rule” (p. 106). An event obeys no rules or principles unless those principles are “principles of disorder, that is, principles without principles” (Derrida, 1992, p. 123). Considering that an event’s occurrence exceeds or resists our horizons of

expectation, the principles of its occurrence must be principles of *disorder* because its appearance disrupts our conditions of possibility for an experience. Consequently, an event is an experience of the other that resists the hegemony of subjectivity. Derrida utilizes this notion of the secret as a “way to let the other be, to respect alterity” (Caputo, 1997, p. 180). An event as other can happen in the realm of the same, the realm of phenomenology, but when it happens there, it does not appear according to our expected principles for phenomena. It irrupts into the same *as* the other. Thus, an event is irreducible to our phenomenological horizons that it interrupts and keeps open. It, then, appears without appearing. It shows up according to its own order or conditions of possibility and not our own. It appears as the correlate of an intention that cannot confine it. It surprises and exceeds us. As such, an event is a secret.

For this reason, Derrida insists that an event is also symptomatological. He uses this term not in any clinical or psychoanalytic sense. Rather, he says that “this notion of symptom” (p. 105) comes from what he thinks about “verticality” (Derrida, 2001). The arrival of an event is an arrival that “falls on me” (Derrida, 2001, p. 97). He insists “on the verticality of this matter because the surprise can only come from on high” (Derrida, 2001, p. 97). Without this verticality, we could see an event coming on the horizon. We could expect an event. But, as we have seen, an event is precisely that which surprises and that which is an exception or without law. Thus, the symptomatology of an event suggests that an event’s arrival “can only give rise [*donner lieu à*] to symptoms” (p. 106) that befall us after the event’s occurrence (Derrida, 2001). An event manifests itself only in symptoms: without horizon, surprising, unexpected, aleatory, excessive, transformative, etc. Thus, if an event comes, a technological invention or a gift of forgiveness, for instance, it happens as a singular surprise, as “always exceptional” and “without rule” (Derrida, 2001, p. 106). Through its exceptional happening, an event as other enters phenomenality with a kind of “transcendental violence” (Derrida, 1978, p. 123).<sup>3</sup> An event arrives in such a way that we can say something about the symptoms that have befallen us with its arrival. Yet at the same time, an event arrives without arriving. The event still remains other and, thereby, secret and im-possible.

While Derrida’s work has proved helpful in understanding the largely agreed upon symptoms of an event, important differences in the philosophical approaches to the event remain. One such difference concerns the contrasting temporalities of an event: “following the event” and “awaiting the event in its imminence” (van der Heiden, 2014, p. 137). Some figures, for example, Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Marion, and Claude Romano, orient the temporality of an event around a *past* occurrence whose givenness causes us to return repeatedly to this occurrence in an effort to understand and mine its depths. Consequently, these philosophers use *birth* as their primary figuration of an event. Marion claims, for example, that I *continually* aim at my own birth “intentionally” by “wanting to know who and from where I am, undertaking research into my

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<sup>3</sup> Here I am drawing on Derrida’s account of transcendental violence in his essay “Violence and Metaphysics.” Using Husserl, he critiques Levinas by saying, “[I]t is impossible to encounter the alter ego ... impossible to respect it in experience and in language, if this other, in its alterity, does not appear for an ego (in general)” (p. 123). Alterity, the other, must appear in the same, in phenomenality, for us to have any relation with or recognition of this other. Yet such an appearance of the other in the same “in which the other appears as other, and lends itself to language ... is perhaps to give oneself over to violence ... an original, transcendental violence, previous to every ethical choice” (p. 125).

identity” (Marion, 2002, p. 42). Our life is “solely occupied ... with reconstituting [our birth], attributing to it a meaning and responding to its silent appeal” (Marion, 2002, p. 42).

And yet other figures, such as Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Luc Nancy, orient the temporality of an event around the advent of what is to come. *Death* has, consequently, become an important figuration of an event for these philosophers.<sup>4</sup> Yet the predominant approach to death has been through personal death or personal mortality. Since at least Plato, the history of philosophy has been preoccupied with the death of the self or one’s own death. Heidegger’s existential analytic of Dasein’s being-toward-death in *Being and Time*—where he argues that anxiety over one’s own death is our originary experience of death that exposes us to our own being, our relation to temporality, and our responsibility to become a self—has made this focus on our own death especially important. Adhering to Heidegger’s analysis, one’s own death can be understood as an event because our anticipation of this end engenders new interpretations of our being and of the meaning or being of things around us (Polt, 2014). However, not until the works of Levinas and Derrida has this focus on our own death found important philosophical objection. They agree that our own death is not the most fundamental experience of death because the death *of the other* is more fundamental. As Levinas (2000) says, “The death of the other: therein lies the first death” (p. 43). And they each maintain that the self is constituted first and foremost through its responsibility to the other. Consequently, the death of the other is the “more originary experience” of death because it “institutes responsibility ... in the ethical dimension of sacrifice” (Derrida, 2008, p. 48).<sup>5</sup> My “right to be” a self, then, “is already my responsibility for the death of the Other” (Levinas, 1989, p. 86).

What remains to be done in this history of the event and its relation to death is to provide a phenomenology of the death *of the other*, in particular, that helps to understand this ordinary experience as an event. Such a description would offer an account according to the symptoms of an event. Consequently, the following describes the unexpected, im-possible arrival of the death of the other, the excessiveness of this arrival beyond our conceptual and linguistic horizons of rationality, and its transformative potentiality.

### The Symptoms of the Death of the Other

If the death of the other is an event, it must arrive without our ability to be ready for it. The death of the other must be an unexpected occurrence. This unpredictability is rather obvious in the case of tragic deaths. When parents must live on after the death of their own child, they are “experiencing the unimaginable and never expected experience of being a bereaved parent” (Bright et al., 2015, p. 1). As a bereaved parent, the natural flow of life has been brought to a halt: children are supposed to bury their parents—not the other way around. The natural flow of one

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy does, however, admit, “In a birth or in a death—examples which are not examples, but more than examples; they are the thing itself—there is the event, some[thing] awaited, something that might have been able to be” (p. 167).

<sup>5</sup> cf. Derrida’s criticism of Heidegger’s analysis of being-toward-death in *Aporias* where he says, “[M]an, or man as Dasein, never has a relation to death as such, but only to [the] perishing [of animals], to [our own] demising, and to the death of the other .... The death of the other thus becomes again ‘first,’ always first .... The death of the other, this death of the other in ‘me’ [in the experience of mourning], is fundamentally the only death that is named in the syntagm ‘my death’” (1993, p. 76).

generation to the next has unexpectedly been reversed. When Lori and Brian McDermott lost their twenty-one year old daughter, Maia, to a car accident, they comment that their past experiences of losing their own parents, grandparents, uncles, and cousins “provided little preparation for what [they] were now experiencing” (McDermott & McDermott, 2011, p. 12). The tragic loss of their child was unexpected and surprising, and their past experiences of death could not prepare them for this singular event. Thus, we can say that sudden deaths surprise us because we did not see them coming, literally, and we could not have imagined them happening and especially in the way that they happened. However, the more planned, predicted, or *imminent* deaths of the other seem problematic. These deaths do not seem to be unpredictable, especially when we consider the instances of death where the other plans her own death on a particular date—as Brittany Maynard did on November 1, 2014—or when a doctor declares that a patient has a limited number of months left to live.

This important difference between different ways that the other dies notwithstanding, all deaths of the other, even if imminent, remain *unpredictable*. After all, the focus with the death of the other is as much about the inception of this event when the other dies as it is about *living on* after this death, that is, *surviving* the other. Whether the loss of the other was sudden or expected, one factual element pervades all of these experiences: those who survive the death of the other must live on in the world without this other. And this experience of survival is always unexpected because we can never be prepared for how the loss of the meaningfulness of things in our worlds will touch us after the other is gone. We can see from this experience the integral connection among the unexpectedness of the death of the other and its transformative nature. Before turning to the latter directly, understanding the excessiveness of the death of the other will help us more fully appreciate its transformative potentiality.

If the death of the other is an event, it must not only arrive unexpectedly but also excessively so. The arrival of the death of the other is excessive because it exceeds our conceptual and linguistic horizons of rationality. No matter how much factual information a person may have about when and how the other has died, the survivor continually comes back to the question, in one form or another, of *why* the other has died. In the wake of Maia’s death, the McDermotts express that “there is no reason for a loss that hurts this much” (McDermott & McDermott, 2011, p. 96). When Tommy Givens, “a Baptist pastor’s kid, lifelong Christian, former missionary and seminary professor,” survived his father’s death from Lou Gehrig’s disease, he describes his experience in this way:

Everything was the same, and yet his father was gone .... [Tommy] stood in his parents’ living room where his father had just died—and wondered what to do next. ‘We were groping for what might help us navigate something very profound,’ [Tommy] recalled, ‘something that would shape us for the rest of our lives.’ (Thompson, 2015, pp. 23-24)

Regardless of the answers that Tommy’s own faith had to offer him in this experience, he continued to grope for something that would make sense of it. Belief in seeing the deceased again in the afterlife may assuage some worries in the survivor, but this belief does not help explain why the other has been lost. No exhaustive account or reasonable explanation placates the trauma and pain that accompanies this loss. Even Jesus, whom Christianity claims to be both human and God and would, thereby, know the bliss that one of his followers would experience in

the afterlife, weeps when his friend Lazarus dies. The death of the other resists any principle of sufficient reason, that is, resists this horizon of expectation as to why the other has died. We may certainly know what caused the death: heart failure, cancer, overdose, respiratory failure, etc. Often these medical explanations can alleviate some of the pain, but none of nor all of them can cause us to stop asking why the other has died. These sufficient reasons cannot explain away the grief, pain, and trauma of this loss. Suddenly, the survivors find themselves in the world of Voltaire's (1950) *Candide* where the principle of sufficient reason has been reduced to a "pitiable state" (p. 29) unable to explain why *this* state of affairs "is for the best in this world" (p. 43).<sup>6</sup>

One phenomenological footprint for this excessiveness of the death of the other is the cyclical nature of the mourning or grieving process. We repeatedly return to the death of the other, perhaps even to its inception at the passage from life to corpse, in an effort to mine the depths of this event. Yet we cannot reason our way through this event as evidenced by repeatedly living through and beyond this moment itself in our work of mourning. The death of the other is a traumatic event that, as such, "is not remembered per se, but recurringly relived" (Jones, 2014, p. 141).<sup>7</sup> The experience of the death of the other is relived "'belatedly' in the form of intrusive and uncontrollable flashbacks" (Jones, 2014, p. 152). The survivors of the death remain unable "to integrate the experience into ordinary systems of personal history and meaning" because this trauma "short-circuits" the brain (Jones, 2014, p. 151). The event "remain[s] stuck and never gain[s] access to the frontal lobes [of the brain], which is not only where language arises but is also the part of the brain that reasons and understands" (Jones, 2014, p. 151). Thus, we often hear from survivors who have lost loved ones that they cannot believe he or she is gone. They are struck by the reality of the other's absence, by this absence's facticity, but they fail to "'believe in it,' or say what it is" (Jones, 2014, p. 152). Consequently, these survivors tell and retell the story of the death of the other along with the stories about the life lived by the other who has been lost. The survivors find themselves mourning the loss of the other but unable to work fully through this loss. Their past loss continues to haunt their present. Thus, their work of mourning remains *workless*. As workless, their mourning is a *negotiation* between moving completely beyond their loss, in a sense forgetting the other who has been lost by interiorizing the other in their own memory, and what Freud calls melancholia, that is, never coming to terms with the death of the other. Derrida (2005b) maintains, in this regard, that a "certain melancholy must still protest against normal mourning" (p. 160) because the other *as other* can never be interiorized or appropriated to the subjectivity of the survivor. In the McDermotts' mourning of their daughter's death, their mourning remains workless because "finding the balance between the 'old normal' and the 'new normal' would probably be a constant challenge forever more" (McDermott & McDermott, 2011). This cyclical, workless nature of mourning is a process that attempts to appropriate the unexpected loss of meaning or the unexpected absence made present in the world when the other dies. Yet this appropriation always fails on account of the excessiveness of this loss beyond our reasoning and explanatory capacities.

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<sup>6</sup> Exceptions to this might be when the deceased was a terrible person who mistreated or even abused those around him or her. In these cases, we might think that the death of such an other engenders a state of affairs that is for the best in the world. Though this might be an exception, such a death would still come unexpectedly and be transformative of the world.

<sup>7</sup> While Jones's account of trauma fits nicely here with this description of the death of the other as an event, she does not associate the trauma of the death of the other with this term of art event.

If the death of the other is an event, it must not only arrive unexpectedly and excessively but also with transformative, disruptive potentiality. When this event occurs, it transforms our meaningful contexts that have been constituted in relation to the other. In this transformation, we experience the death of the other as more than just the loss of the person because it is also a loss of the world. It is a death of the world. Here the term *world* is understood phenomenologically as the context in which things and others have their particular meanings on account of the bequest of history, heritage, and tradition. Thus, the world is understood as the meaningful *contexts* in which we find ourselves. While the earth on which we all live can be described as a world in this sense, this one world or context of meaning that we all share is at the same time many worlds.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in life we find ourselves in many worlds in which things and people have meaning: home, work, the university, the study, the classroom, etc. And the constitution of these worlds, as both Heidegger but more importantly Nancy maintain, occurs always with the others with whom we are in relation. Drawing on this understanding of the *with-world* or the world as co-constituted with others, the event of the death of the other not only shows us, often for the first time, that our worlds are always with-worlds but also marks our with-worlds with an absence of meaning or a givenness of recess. The death of the other, then, discloses both the birth of the world as a with-world and an end of the world.

Consequently, when the other dies, his or her absence is given to us or made present to us especially when we return to those places that mean the most to us on account of the moments we have shared in these spaces with the one who is now dead. The meaninglessness that attends the things in our world afterwards indicates how the death of the other is both an end of the world but also an origin of the world (Derrida, 2005b).<sup>9</sup> For example, when a loved one dies and you visit what used to be *your* (plural) favorite restaurant, now that he or she is dead, everything seems off, uncomfortable, or strange. “It just doesn’t feel the same without him/her,” we often hear from people in these situations. The food, though it is the same chef, ingredients, dish, and recipe, may even taste different. This alteration arises on account of the absence of the other that is made present at the restaurant. Moreover, how often do we hear of a person or family moving houses after a husband, wife, partner, or child dies? The absence of the other is so present that it can become deafening in the house, making the house almost uninhabitable. When what we love is lacking,

[t]he one who loves sees the world only through the absence of what he loves, and this absence ... flows back on the entire world .... [T]he world has not disappeared; it remains present ... but this disappearance [of what is loved] nevertheless strikes the appearance of the world with vanity. (Marion, 1991, p. 136)

The McDermotts’ evidence this death of the world marked by the vanity or meaninglessness of things in their own experience of the death of their daughter. They describe this death as a

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<sup>8</sup> The German *die Umwelt* captures this sense of world nicely because it denotes the world (*Welt*) surrounding (*Um-*) us.

<sup>9</sup> Here, I am drawing from and elaborating on Derrida’s insight about how one of Paul Celan’s poems, “Rams,” which concerns the death of the other, “says the world, the origin and the history of the world ... how the world was conceived, how it is born and straightaway is no longer” (*Sovereignities in Question*, p. 162).

“shattering [of] our world” (p. ix) in which they have been “left behind ... to adjust and find meaning” (p. xiii) in “a most unwelcome new world” (McDermott & McDermott, 2011, p. 3). After their loss on February 20th, they awoke to “a totally upended world” (p. 2) that they name “the post-220 world” (p. 27) and “the post-220 journey” (p. 35) (McDermott & McDermott, 2011). But when they return to Maia’s room and experience the presence of her absence through the things in her room, they recognize in this not only the end but also the birth of their world:

When we opened the door and saw all of her things arranged as if in a state of permanent suspended animation, tears fell from our eyes and our hearts filled with sorrow. The still incomprehensible reality of it all hit us again: Maia’s not coming back to finish reading that book by the bed, or go to the next class on her schedule, or use her computer to send us an email, or cuddle with all those pillows. (McDermott & McDermott, 2011, p. 28)

They recognize that the book, the computer, the pillows, and the entire room has, or is, the meaning that it has on account of their relation with Maia through these things. The McDermotts recognize that “[d]eath sets a thing significant” (Dickinson, 2013, p. 93) because, often, only when the other has been lost, do we then recognize that things like a book, computer, or pillows in a world have the meaning or significance that they have on account of the relation of these things with the one who has died. Only then do we recognize the birth of the world as a *with-world* at the death of the world. The meaningful context of Maia’s room and all of the things in it was co-constituted with Maia—it is a with-world. However, with Maia’s death, the meaningfulness of this with-world has been lost. Her death marks a death of this world so that when they experience this post-220 world, they are experiencing the presence of Maia’s absence through the recess of meaning or the meaninglessness of the things in their with-world without Maia. In a sense not unlike the transformation of the mulberry tree in Ovid’s poem, this absence made present in the world after the death of the other is a token of mourning that the world itself carries in the wake of the death of the other. To experience the death of the other, to undergo this event, is to survive a death of the world, and this survival, as we can see, extends beyond the moment in which the person is actually lost.

Consequently, this description of the death of the other shows that this event is not readily reducible to an inaccessible instant of passage from life to death but includes living on after the other is gone. The death of the other includes the aftermath, the shock, and the grieving of the loss of the person as well as the loss of what the world has meant to and with that person. The death of the other includes the grieving of a death of the world. After all, this loss of the world with the other is happening; for instance, in the instant that the funeral is being prepared and happening or tours of new houses are being given. Thus, when the death of the other happens, occurs, breaks in, interrupts, or disrupts, it marks a transformation of the world. The pre-event world and the post-event world are radically different insofar as the meaning of the world, the world itself, has been lost. A “new order of [the] world” is at play when the other dies (Bright et al., 2013, p. 6). Therefore, when a husband, wife, partner, or child dies, those who survive this person often move houses because the presence of the other’s absence is suffocating now that the survivor of the other must carry on life in the house that he or she helped establish as the home, as one of the worlds for the family. For the loss that is experienced is the loss of what the world had meant to that person and what the world had meant to us, or to a group, on account of our relation with the now deceased. The being-with of the restaurant, the food, the house, etc.

includes the now dead other. So when we revisit those places where he or she used to be or that meant this or that to us on account of that person, we experience this absence, this token of mourning. The event of the death of the other transforms everything because the world means differently, *worlds* differently, in the aftermath or in the event of death.

One of the most profound ways that the world *worlds* differently concerns the effect of the other's death on the foundation of our temporal existence. Certainly the death of the other is recorded as having taken place at a particular, temporal moment or now point: "The estimated time of death was..." "She was pronounced dead at..." Time of death is codified on the death certificate. But the phenomenon of the death of the other as a whole is both inside time in this way while also outside of time. This death operates outside of time because in disrupting the world, this event solicits or shakes the foundations of our experience of temporality.

On the one hand, the event of the death of the other "ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact" (Blanchot, 1986, p. 1). Death simultaneously ruins the world while leaving life intact. Despite the fact that we may have just lost a loved one, a friend, a neighbor, a beloved pet, a mentor, God, etc., life continues as usual: the sun continues to rise, the weather continues to change, and work must still be done. As the McDermotts (2011) put it, "[T]he post-220 world still retained the entire pre-220 work world" (p. 35). When life seems like it should stop on account of the loss that has happened, life continues despite the death that marks a death of the world. Life goes on in a way that "the new normal" becomes "facing the realities of life without" the other who has died (Bright et al., 2015, p. 7). Moreover, we now have myriad questions and problems to deal with: Who's the next of kin that we need to call? When will the funeral be? What do we do with the body: cremation or burial? What kind of music at the funeral? Who will speak at the memorial? What about her car? How will the department recover from this? Who will grade his students' papers? Am I ok? Should I see a therapist? Life continues intact but am I intact? Will I recover? In fact, the wholeness of the self of those who survive this event may precisely be unwhole, incomplete, or fractured. Death ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact. Death may leave everything intact but only in some incomplete way. We seek closure over the death of the other but, perhaps, we are never "to have closure over such an event and perhaps we do not even want it" (Bright et al, 2015, p. 8). Perhaps, the closure we seek when the other dies remains a lack of closure. Such a lack could be a recognition that our mourning is workless. Or, perhaps, this lack of closure could result from the reality that someone might be irrevocably ruined, driven mad, driven to his or her own end because of the death of the other. This is always a possibility. After all, one of the things for which we can never be ready is how the death of the world that attends the death of the other, which almost just is the death of the other, will touch us. Consequently, the death of the other in its ruination of the world may be a surprise or something we did not see coming. "She was too young to die." "We all knew he wasn't in good health, but I still cannot believe he is gone." "It just doesn't make sense." Or simply, "Why?" Beyond this surprise of the event in its happening, the way in which everything is left intact may even surprise us. The alarm-clock goes off one morning months after she is gone and the first thought from the survivor is, "Another day? Do I really have to get up? Why am I still like this?" Thus, the restitution after the event of the death of the other may be a tragic one. And it may not be. Both are always live options here because we are dealing with an irruption of singularity and contingency, that is, with an event. The rupture of the world surprises us. The continuation of life after this death surprises us. Moreover, the rupture surprises in the

instant that the restitution surprises us. The death of the world with the other is taking place in the instant that we plan the funeral, look for a new house, distribute his students' papers to be graded, visit our favorite restaurant for the first time post-event, etc. Consequently, the rupture and restitution of the world after the event bleed into one another, overlap one another, or instantly take place with one another. The moment of the loss of the other, the inception of the event, becomes a past that will not stay put. This past moment of the event has returned, come again—*revenir*—like a specter or *revenant* come to haunt the present.

And in its haunting, on the other hand, we are reminded not only of the loss of the other and the loss of the meaningfulness that attended our relation with her but also of the loss of the future. As the McDermotts (2011) attest, “[I]t is now time to emerge and face a totally upended world and *a future* that had shifted 180 degrees [emphasis added]” (p. 25). The possibilities that we once hoped for in relation with the other are now no more. Such possibilities are, as futural, constituted by their absence that we hope one day will become actual and present. But now that hope for the actualization of these possibilities is lost itself thereby re-doubling the absence that constitutes them.

Therefore, our temporal existence after this event of the death of the other is thoroughly out of joint (Shakespeare & Hubler, 1987). The present remains haunted by a past that draws us back to the moment of the inception of this event. And yet this past continually returns or comes again as if from the future because “the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back” (Derrida, 1994, p. 48). Moreover, the present is riddled with the absence of future possibilities once hoped for but now lost or gone with the death of the other. Our experience of temporality is thoroughly solicited, fractured, and shaken by this unexpected and excessive event to the extent that the world, the with-world, we still share after this event will never be the same. The world may still be present but its presence is felt as the absence of the other who has died. Such is this tremendous, monstrous, or *ungeheuer* event of the death of the other.

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